

This tool pairs students and engages them in a back-and-forth written discussion about their writing and strategies to improve upon it.

Buddy Journal

You know the old adage, “Two heads are better than one.” When individuals work together, each has the potential to benefit from the other’s strengths. Consider your favorite author. The writing process to produce a novel can be painstaking. Several drafts are revised. The author must likely collaborate with content experts, an editing team, a graphics team, and perhaps, additional contributors—all to produce the final copy.

In an educational setting, student-to-student collaboration is especially effective. Students generally enjoy speaking with their peers, and teachers want to maximize feedback for each student. Providing academic structure for student socialization is a win-win situation and creates a student community that is resourceful and accountable for individual learning.

Using a Buddy Journal, students are engaged in a back-and-forth written discussion about their writing and strategies to improve upon it. The writing focus is determined by the teacher, whether it be editing grammar, punctuation, spelling, or revising ideas. This is most commonly done through student-to-student or teacher-to-student conferences during the revision stage of the writing process.



With this strategy, students alternate the roles of reader and author. Each author receives immediate feedback regarding the journal’s writing focus, as the reader can ask for clarifications, or make corrections to their buddy’s work. The author clarifies, elaborates, or better illustrates his or her writing intentions in response to the reader’s questions. As a result, both buddies engage in a collaborative way to immediately improve their writing.

Feedback is essential. Students must identify errors in order to correct them. Exposure to different perspectives and interpretations is useful for all authors. Engaging in an exchange about writing intention and the actual composition can make all the difference in developing the writing piece. The more experience students have with this activity, the better-trained they become on the correct writing mechanics and elements to improve their own writing.

Buddy Journal (continued)

How to Use a Buddy Journal

1. Pair

Determine buddy pairs ahead of time. This can be done on ability level, or it can be randomized. Change buddies as needed.

2. Assign

Assign a prompt or question that the students will be writing about in their journals. Typically, this will be a response to something just covered in the classroom, but Buddy Journals can begin as responses to simple “getting-to-know-you” questions.

3. Write

The two students who have been assigned as buddies write to each other in separate journals for an allotted amount of time. After the time expires, the buddies switch journals, read, and then respond to what their partner has written.

4. Monitor

Monitor the writing in the journals and occasionally collect them to read the entries. Spot-check the entries as students are writing to clear up any misconceptions. As an option, have students share their written conversations with the rest of the class.

Before students begin their Buddy Journal, these are the steps you need to share with students:

- ♦ Model the task objective with mock examples of poor writing so students can practice and identify errors.
- ♦ Explicitly state how to provide respectful feedback and explain that participating in this task is crucial to the successful writing of every student.
- ♦ Observe the students role-play how they would provide respectful criticism. An effective and positive way to do so is by providing the language and phrases that will be used during this task. For example; two stars and a wish is a way for students to find two things that they like about what they read, and the wish is to suggest a way for the writing to be improved upon.

When to Use a Buddy Journal

Use Buddy Journals at any point in the lesson to structure meaningful written conversations between students:

- ♦ During the Guided Practice section of a lesson so students can discuss information just covered
- ♦ During peer conferencing as students go through the writing process
- ♦ As a closing activity for students to review what was learned in the lesson
- ♦ As an alternative to a verbal paired discussion

Buddy Journal Variations

Teacher Dialogue Journal

In this journal tool, students write back-and-forth with their teacher rather than with another classmate. This dialogue allows both the students and the teacher to comment on each other’s entries.

Team Journals

When working on group projects, all members of the group or team are responsible for writing in the journal. They can write about their views of the project, new information they have learned from the project, and they can respond to their teammates’ entries.



Buddy Journal (continued)

Rainbow Revisions

The teacher assigns a purpose for each colored pencil or highlighter; for example, use different colors to represent a different part of speech—noun, verb, and adjective. An objective for young writers is that they develop fluency and word choice within their writing. Once each buddy has completed this portion of the task, students return the writing to the author. The author reviews the revisions, and makes corrections and decisions about fragments, details, or repetitive language.

Value of Using a Buddy Journal

- ♦ All language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are incorporated in this task.
- ♦ Combining reading and writing tasks optimizes overall literacy skills.
- ♦ Students are challenged to see things from a different perspective.
- ♦ Students are engaged in purposeful discourse, thus improving written communication.
- ♦ Teachers have an opportunity to quickly assess what each student knows and ascertain what skills are still lacking.
- ♦ Literacy skills can be reinforced through repeated exposure to vocabulary and syntax patterns.
- ♦ Peer collaboration provides multiple opportunities to read, write, listen, and talk about the material.
- ♦ Students develop their written communication, which not only improves reading and writing, but also embodies many of the behavioral characteristics that will help them to be successful in a collaborative world.

The Buddy Journal is an efficient assessment tool. Students receive immediate feedback on their writing from peers; the explanations and clarifications written in response to questions help students better organize and focus their ideas; then, they can immediately make these revisions. While students participate in this technique, the teacher monitors and guides the task objective by asking questions to understand why students made a particular comment, what is lacking to best articulate their idea, and referring students to their guidelines for the task or strategies to implement. When reviewing the final product, the teacher can utilize the Buddy Journal notes and observations in the assessment. The combination of improving through the process and the final product is a more accurate performance assessment.